

Dear Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, Ranking Member Berthel, Ranking Member McCarty, Vice Chairs, and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Julie McNulty. I am a resident of Norwalk, and a parent of a child who has been a student of Norwalk Public Schools since kindergarten and is now a Junior in high school. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of H.B. 5283.

I am testifying in support of this bill because throughout my daughter's 11 years at NPS it has become evident that many students do not have access to the resources necessary to support their specific learning needs. Over the years I have witnessed efforts to address these needs fall short due to lack of funding. Meanwhile, valuable programs and resources that other towns take for granted have been cut from our school budget, which has affected all students. Our classrooms are overcrowded and under-staffed and support personnel cannot keep up with the demand for services. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these problems. A recent Norwalk survey done in 2021, showed that almost half (46.2%) of our high school students reported experiencing depression or symptoms of depression, which is 15% percent higher than the 2019 statewide high school rate, identified by the CT Youth Risky Behavior Survey. With the upcoming loss of ESSER funds, we could see a further reduction in critical mental health support staff when they will be needed the most to curb the impending mental health crisis, especially among our youth.

Norwalk has almost 12,000 students, of which, 74% identify as students of color (BIPOC), and 68% of our students are identified as high needs. It seems incredibly unfair that Norwalk allocates \$19,770 per pupil spending, while our neighboring towns, such as Wilton and Darien, allocate over \$22,000 per pupil spending and roughly 20% of their student population are high needs. These figures show the disproportionality between the number of students in need, and the dollars the students receive depending on the school system. The only difference between students in neighboring towns receiving more funds, and students in Norwalk, is their zip code.

In addition to the disadvantages Norwalk students are already facing, the town is set to lose its Alliance District status. This means that while our school district is performing better than before, and has outperformed the metrics of the program, this results in a gradual decrease of funds received annually. Year after year, our students have been improving and our community, teachers, and administrators have increased our ability to meet each student's individual needs and give them the resources to prosper. The loss of this funding only puts that progress in greater jeopardy.

With this knowledge – and the fact that our school district is facing a looming threat of the impending federal fiscal cliff due to the loss of ESSER funding – we know that now more than ever, Norwalk and our State can only bridge this financial gap with the influx of additional funds.

We are grateful that this bill recognizes the need to create a more equitable Connecticut, both racially and socio-economically, and will take steps to bring us closer

to that reality. Though this bill alone will not completely close the racial funding gap, it does put our state on the right path by beginning the conversation. Thank you for your time today and I urge you to support this bill.

Julie McNulty